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Carol X Weakley 09/12/2006 11:36:47 AM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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ACTION: ECON
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DISSEMINATION: ECON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003607

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STATE FOR NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016

TAGS: KPAL PTER PREL LE SY IS

SUBJECT: MFA DG ABRAMOVITCH DISCUSSES ABBAS, LEBANON AND
REALIGNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons 1.4(b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a September 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Israeli MFA Director General (DG) Aharon Abramovitch confided that Foreign Minister Livni's recent public remarks encouraging a renewed dialogue with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas should not be interpreted as internal GOI political consensus supporting such talks. He said that the GOI must first see that Abbas has the political strength to deliver on the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit and the cessation of Kassam rocket fire from Gaza before engaging him on greater political issues. Regarding Lebanon, Abramovitch said that the GOI will insist on a strong UNIFIL presence along the Syrian/Lebanese border. Next, the GOI will push for the establishment of a "serious mechanism" for sanctioning countries that attempt to arm Hizballah in order to "reveal" the state-sponsors of Hizballah terror to the world. Discussing his earlier work in chairing a governmental committee on realignment, Abramovitch explained that the committee's report is not a study of Olmert's specific "realignment plan," but a general overview of Israel's strategic interests regarding the future of the West Bank that had been commissioned in late 2005 by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. End summary.

LIVNI AHEAD OF GOI ON TALKS WITH ABBAS

¶2. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's request for

clarification of Livni's recent public support for renewed talks with PA President Abbas, Abramovitch indicated that Livni was not speaking on behalf of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. He conceded that there is no "internal consensus" within the GOI for supporting renewed dialogue with Abbas. (However, he added that Livni's remarks represented a "large faction" within the GOI.) Putting the onus back on Abbas, the DG said that the GOI would not "meet for the sake of meeting," but would require Abbas to demonstrate progress on the issues of kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit and the continued firing of Kassam rockets into Israel from Gaza. He assured the Ambassador that the GOI had also not forgotten about the Quartet's three conditions as a premise for dialogue. He characterized Shalit's release and the Kassam rocket ceasefire as basic tests of Abbas's political strength to actually deliver on promises, and said that the GOI must see that Abbas has sufficient strength before engaging him on greater political issues.

ACCESS AND MOVEMENT AGREEMENT

¶13. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that the USG is re-examining the Access and Movement Agreement (AMA) as it nears its first anniversary. He explained that the USG is not completely satisfied with several aspects of AMA implementation, such as operation of the crossings, obstacles to movement in the West Bank, and convoys between Gaza and the West Bank.

GOI TO PUSH UNIFIL PRESENCE ON SYRIA/LEBANON BORDER

¶14. (C) Regarding Israel's short-term, post-war objectives in Lebanon, Abramovitch told the Ambassador that the main threat to the ceasefire is the re-armament of Hizballah, primarily by Syria and Iran. Therefore, the GOI will insist on a strong UNIFIL presence along the Syrian/Lebanese border. Next, the GOI wants the establishment of a "serious mechanism" for sanctioning countries that attempt to arm Hizballah in order to "reveal the picture" of state-sponsored terrorism to the world. The DG acknowledged that covert arms smuggling would be difficult to reveal given the intelligence community's reluctance to publicly share information.

¶15. (C) Abramovitch assessed that Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora might be open to renewing a dialogue with the GOI as part of his desire to "change the situation." Abramovitch stressed that the GOI would not accept the defunct Armistice Committee as a venue for dialogue, because the agreement that had spawned the Armistice Committee addressed a boundary line that differs from today's Blue Line. It also placed limits on the military presence on both sides of the border which would be undesirable in today's situation. However, Abramovitch was optimistic that a mechanism similar to the Armistice Committee would be acceptable to facilitate dialogue among Israel, UNIFIL, and Lebanon. He posited that such a committee could address civilian issues, such as water and air pollution, and perhaps eventually, trade. Abramovitch concluded by saying that in the current political environment, it might be too risky for Siniora to address this topic. The Ambassador encouraged the GOI to push for the full implementation of UNSCR 1701, but agreed that the GOI should allow the political situation in Lebanon to settle a bit before making political demands of the GOL.

INSIGHT INTO REALIGNMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

¶16. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about his work as chairman of a government committee on realignment, the DG played down the significance of his committee's report in the current political environment. Abramovitch explained that this report was commissioned by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in December 2005, when he was still DG of the Justice

Ministry, and was not a study of current Prime Minister Olmert's specific "realignment plan." Abramovitch clarified that the committee had completed a draft report, which was not yet "finalized," and had not been formally transmitted to Olmert's office. He added that the committee's work had been overtaken by the war, with which many of its members were directly involved, such as IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Moshe Kaplinski.

¶ 17. (C) Abramovitch further explained that the goal of the report was not to make explicit policy recommendations, but rather to identify Israel's strategic interests regarding the future of the West Bank. He conceded that it might be possible to draw conclusions from the report by "reading between the lines," but remained insistent that the committee was not asked to provide policy recommendations. He said that the committee was under no current pressure to finalize the report, but that the interests identified in it are as valid today as they were before the war in Lebanon.

LIVNI'S TRIP TO THE U.S.

¶ 18. (C) Abramovitch told the Ambassador that Israeli Ambassador Daniel Ayalon's replacement had not yet been selected and no announcement would be forthcoming during Livni's trip to Washington during the week of September 11. The Ambassador also inquired about the Foreign Minister's availability to attend Secretary Rice's conference on empowering women in New York on September 23. The DG said that Livni would not be in New York at that time. Even if she were, she would not be able to attend an event falling on the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah.

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JONES